

The Problem



Most meetings are boring. The staff knows this, expects this, and brings along a negative attitude, if they come at all. They are late, inattentive, and unwilling to put any energy into the meeting, which makes the meeting less productive, thus adding to the perception that meetings are boring and worthless.

Once this attitude is in motion, it starts a downward spiral until the word "meeting" is enough to send staff morale into the gutter.

The old adage is, "Some people 'do', others 'meet'." Yet, the most successful companies have regular meetings, too. In fact, many of those companies give much of the credit for their success to their meetings.

What are they doing different?

The Goal – Make Your Meetings Energetic, Fun and Productive

You want your meetings to be productive. You want your meetings to be worthwhile. You want your staff to be excited to come to a meeting, willing to participate, and full of ideas.

You can get there when you follow some simple steps for **making your meetings more energetic, more fun, and more engaging.**

Are you ready?

Where to Start

What do you want your meeting to accomplish? Where is the finish line? How do you complete the sentence,



"This will be a successful meeting if..."

This is the Goal of your meeting. Write it down. Put it in big bold letters at the top of a blank piece of paper.

Every meeting needs to have a Goal. And the Goal is the most important element of the meeting. Every activity in the meeting must be centered around the Goal. And the bigger the Goal, the more productive the meeting. Don't make it your Goal to just simply to pass along info. You can do that with a memo, poster, email, or sign.

Think big. Make big Goals. Strive to accomplish great things in your meetings. That's what fires up the staff. Every successful meeting starts with a clear understanding of the goal, of the end result.

Tasks vs. Goals

Most meetings have an agenda of things to do. I call those Tasks. Tasks are important, but they are not the main purpose of your meeting. Tasks are the things you do during your meeting to reach your Goals.

Think of it this way...

- **Tasks** are something you or the staff does.
- **Goals** are something you or the staff learns or achieves.



When you plan your meeting make sure the tasks, the agenda items, lead towards the Goal.

Pathway

Once you have established your Goal for the meeting, take your piece of paper and begin writing down all possible Tasks that can help you reach your Goal. Focus on actions that lead to the goal. It is proven time and again that we learn best by

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doing, so look for Tasks that involve your staff actively doing something.

Examples can include skits, games, small group activities, competitions, written exercises, homework, pop quizzes. Or look for new and unique ways to present information such as PowerPoint presentations, guest speakers, movies, or even staff presentations.

No Task is too crazy to be written down. Think outside the boardroom. Remember that not everyone learns the same way.

Once you have your list of Tasks designed to accomplish your Goal, pare down the list to two options.

Option #1 is the Task (or Tasks) that **best** accomplishes your Goal in the time/space constraints you have.

Option #2 is the Task (or Tasks) that is the **most fun** way to accomplish your Goal in the time/space constraints you have.



Once you have identified these two paths, the choice is much easier to make. Ask yourself two questions:

- What would my staff *prefer* to do?
- Will that Task accomplish my Goal?

If you answer Yes to the second question, you have your Tasks. Remember, the more fun it is for them the more productive and energetic they will be.

Plan, Plan, Plan

You now have your Tasks. Next comes the planning.

Look at your logistics. What space do you have? What time



do you have? What props do you need? Start writing down all of the constraints and limitations so that you know exactly what you can and cannot do.

Also, look at what physical limitations your staff might have that may make it more

difficult to accomplish any physical Tasks.

Find all of these obstacles and make plans to eliminate them.

The next step is to prepare your staff. Let them know when and where. Let them know what topics will be discussed if any. Publish an agenda, if available, especially if you expect people to take notes or contribute ideas.

Extroverts do their thinking out loud and in person. They just need to know when and where. **Introverts**, on the other hand, need preparation time if you want them to be involved in any discussion. They need to think through what they want to say before they say it. They need at least 24 hours notice if you want them to contribute.

Also let your staff know the time limits. All meetings must have a set-in-stone end time. Never go past that point. Set an end time and stick to it. Meetings that go too long are one of the biggest morale busters of the staff.

Surprise

We all like pleasant surprises. Plan one into your meetings and you keep the attention level of your staff on high. Surprises can be something like a giveaway. Get some gas cards or gift certificates and give them out through a random drawing or as a reward



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for answering a question.

Surprises can include a special, unannounced guest. Maybe a guest speaker, a client who wants to say "thank you", or a hired speaker that puts a new spin on an old topic. Surprises can include a costume or goofy outfit. One of my best meetings was when I wore the "Toy House Man" costume. I left the room after reading a touching story and returned minutes later in costume and reminded the staff to "be our customer's hero". They still talk about that meeting.



Surprises can include music, slide shows, or anything you can think of that is out of the ordinary. No one remembers ordinary, but they all remember surprising.

Debriefing

Tasks are activities. Goals are learning. There is a simple trick to leading a group from activity to learning - the "What? So What? Now What?" method.



"What?" questions are the **concrete** questions designed to summarize the task just done. What did we do? How did it work? What were the steps involved?

"So What?" questions are **abstract** questions used to draw out the learning from the Task. What did we learn? What did this teach us? Why did we accomplish what we did?

"Now What?" questions are the **application** questions designed to apply the learning from the Task to the Goal. What can we do with this information? How does that apply to us or to our situation?

When you debrief an activity or Task, follow these steps carefully. Fully answer all the possible *What* questions before you move on to the *So What*, etc. Otherwise the conversation bogs down. If it does, simply step back to the previous level

and begin the conversation there.

The Summary

Okay, your meeting has ended. The staff are laughing and joking and filing out of the room. Your goal was accomplished. Or was it?



Every meeting should have a Summary, a written account of what was accomplished, what was learned, and what is expected of everyone. If tasks were assigned, everyone should get an Action List that lets everyone know who is assigned to do what. That way there is no confusion.

The Summary also helps reinforce the learning that was done at the meeting and can work as a reminder of the fun they had and their excitement towards attending another meeting in the near future.

Action List:

- Determine the Goal of your meeting
- Identify all possible Tasks to accomplish your Goal
- Choose the Task that is **most fun** in accomplishing your Goal
- Plan the Task carefully and thoroughly
- Prepare the Staff for the topic to be discussed by printing an announcement and agenda (but leave something out to be a pleasant surprise)
- Debrief the Task using the **What? So What? Now What?** method
- Prepare a Summary/Action List for the staff following the meeting
- **Enjoy their new found productivity and energy!**

